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Twenty-sixth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 1610 (2005) of 30 June 2005, the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) for a final period of six months, until 31 December 2005. In that resolution, the Council welcomed my intention to keep the security, political, humanitarian and human rights situation in Sierra Leone under close review and to report regularly to it. The present report is submitted pursuant to that request and provides an assessment of the security situation and the overall progress made in the drawdown of the Mission since my last report, of 26 April (S/2005/273) and the addendum to it of 28 July (S/2005/273/Add.2).

II. Security situation

2. The overall security situation in Sierra Leone has remained generally calm and stable during the period under review. Furthermore, the Government of Sierra Leone has taken further steps towards assuming full responsibility for the maintenance of security, thus further contributing to the consolidation of peace in the country.

3. Despite funding shortfalls, the performance of the Office of National Security has continued to improve, as has, in particular, its coordination capacity. The national security structure has been consolidated country-wide by means of the provincial and district security committees, which bring together key local officials, including local councils, commanders of the Sierra Leone police and the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces.

4. Despite the current favourable security environment in the country, serious challenges remain, which include the limited progress in addressing the root causes of the conflict such as corruption, governance, widespread poverty, including massive youth unemployment, and the resulting public discontent. These represent a major threat to stability in Sierra Leone.

5. While there are currently no external security threats to the country, the security situation in the subregion remains fragile, as there is a risk of spillover effects of the increased tensions in Liberia owing to the forthcoming elections, to be held in October and uncertainty over the political future in Côte d'Ivoire and

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Guinea. Furthermore, the Governments of Guinea and Sierra Leone need to urgently resolve the territorial dispute over the Yenga village border area in the east, which remains a potential catalyst for trouble.

6. The situation in Liberia has continued to stabilize and the preparations for the October elections are proceeding peacefully. However, the situation in the border areas with Sierra Leone remains of concern and continues to be jointly monitored by UNAMSIL and the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

III. Implementation of the drawdown plan

7. The phased withdrawal of UNAMSIL from Sierra Leone is on course for completion on 20 December. The force, which currently stands at some 3,200 military personnel, including three infantry battalions, and supporting arms and headquarters staff, will commence its withdrawal in mid-September. The withdrawal will be carried out in three phases, including the closure of the United Nations military observers' team sites, withdrawal of the UNAMSIL force and the closure of UNAMSIL force headquarters. The Ghanaian battalion will depart by the end of September. The Pakistani battalion will be repatriated by the end of October, and the Nigerian battalion, supporting arms and services, by 15 December. The last UNAMSIL headquarters staff officers are scheduled to depart from Sierra Leone on 20 December.

8. In support for the Mission's drawdown, UNAMSIL, together with other stakeholders, has designed a public information strategy to raise awareness about the achievements of the Mission and its exit strategy from the country. To that end, a series of activities are being undertaken through the local media and international correspondents on the ground. The media campaign is aimed at raising awareness in the local and international media of the United Nations continuing commitment to Sierra Leone, as well as the mandate and functions of the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone referred to below.

9. The current UNAMSIL civilian police strength stands at 62 personnel. By December 2005, the strength of UNAMSIL civilian police will be reduced to 34 personnel, who will be deployed in Freetown, Lungi airport, Makeni and Bo to cover the western area, and the northern, southern and eastern regions.

IV. Establishment of a United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone

10. By its resolution 1620 (2005) of 31 August, the Security Council established the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) for an initial period of 12 months, beginning on 1 January 2006. To implement this decision of the Security Council, a number of steps are being taken, including the preparation of the budget proposal, staffing, logistical and security arrangements for the establishment of the Office and other arrangements.

V. Progress on benchmarks for the residual presence of the Mission in Sierra Leone

A. Strengthening the capacity of the security sector

11. The security forces of the Government of Sierra Leone have now an enhanced capacity to contain and deal satisfactorily with potential internal threats. They may however be challenged by multiple outbreaks of widespread civil unrest, resulting from a worsening socio-economic situation. Further enhancement of the security sector will depend on the Government's effective funding, strategic planning and management of the security sector.

12. The armed forces continue to face considerable constraints, including in communications equipment and logistical support, particularly with regard to the provision of rations and fuel, as well as ammunition, medical supplies, water and uniforms. In a welcome development, in response to my appeal for support for the armed forces, on 18 August, the Governments of India and Sierra Leone signed an agreement providing for the construction of 400 prefabricated housing barracks for the Sierra Leone Armed Forces. While this important gesture will alleviate to some extent the shortage of accommodation for the armed forces, the overall shortage of accommodation remains a serious problem, which negatively affects the morale of the armed forces. In addition, while the Sierra Leone Armed Forces have received 260 trucks generously donated by the Government of Switzerland, and may receive additional vehicles from donors to further enhance mobility, the use of the armed forces transport fleet is hampered by chronic shortages of fuel.

13. Public confidence in the police has notably increased over the past months. However, the Sierra Leone police have not received any further international assistance over the reporting period. A lack of accommodation in the provinces has continued to hamper the effective deployment of police personnel throughout the country.

14. UNAMSIL civilian police have to date supported the recruitment, training and deployment of some 3,000 Sierra Leone police officers, bringing the current strength of the Sierra Leone police to 8,532 personnel. UNAMSIL civilian police have also continued to assist with the recruitment and training of staff of the immigration and corrections departments. Almost 500 recruits are currently undergoing training at the Hastings Police Training School. Once these trainees graduate on 10 September 2005, the police force will have some 9,000 personnel, which still falls short of the target figure of 9,500 officers. The renovation of the police regional training centres at Makeni, Bo and Kenema has been completed and barracks have been constructed at those centres to accommodate the participants.

15. UNAMSIL civilian police training efforts are expected to continue and the recruitment of a new batch of some 500 additional candidates for the September police training intake is in progress. Training is also under way to enhance the supervisory skills of Sierra Leone police middle-level management personnel. In addition, some 3,400 police personnel have undergone various in-service training programmes and development courses, including computer training. This achievement was made possible thanks to the support of Sierra Leone's partners, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Kingdom Department for International Development, which provided funds and other inputs.

B. Consolidation of State authority

16. During the period under review, further progress continued to be made in the consolidation of State authority. In line with its policy of decentralization, the Government took further steps to devolve major State administrative services in the areas of education, health and agriculture to the local councils. With the assistance of the World Bank, local councils have established their basic administrative and financial systems. While local councils are now functioning, however, their capacity to deliver effective services to the local population remains insufficient, owing to the lack of qualified personnel, financial and logistical constraints, and a poor road network. Nonetheless, given the fact that the system of local government was reinstituted in the country only in 2004, after being in abeyance for 32 years, the advancement of local capacity for resource mobilization and the provision of services is encouraging.

17. In the meantime, the relations between local councils and the traditional chiefdom system are evolving satisfactorily. There is a need, however, to introduce appropriate legislation to harmonize these relations and clarify respective responsibilities, including the control and apportionment of financial resources.

18. UNAMSIL has continued to provide assistance to the Government of Sierra Leone in resolving chiefdom disputes over boundaries and other issues. The Ministry of Local Government and Community Development and local councils, in collaboration with UNAMSIL and civil society organizations, have started a new mediation initiative at the provincial and district level aimed at settling outstanding disputes among chiefdoms by the end of the Mission's mandate.

19. The Government of Sierra Leone, with the support of UNAMSIL, is proceeding with the implementation of the diamond-mining cadastral system launched in December 2004. The establishment of this system is expected to start in Kono in October 2005, and to be expanded later to other diamond-mining areas. By the end of 2004, diamond exports from Sierra Leone totalled $127 million. The diamond exports amounted to some $82 million in the first half of 2005. This exponential growth is believed to be linked to increased Government control over diamond mining and its compliance with the Kimberly Certification Scheme.

20. Nonetheless, the Government will have to continue to deploy considerable efforts to monitor the mines and diamond extraction. While it has deployed monitors in the major diamond-mining areas nationwide, their efficiency remains limited, owing to a lack of transport and other logistical constraints. According to surveys of mining sites conducted by UNAMSIL, more than 50 per cent of diamond mining remains unlicensed, and reports indicate that there is still a considerable degree of illegal diamond smuggling.

VI. Progress in related areas

A. Implementation of the UNAMSIL/United Nations country team transition plan

21. UNAMSIL and the United Nations country team have continued to implement the activities outlined in their joint transition plan aimed at ensuring a seamless

transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding in Sierra Leone, while facilitating the implementation of the Mission's exit strategy. The plan focuses on a number of priority areas, such as further enhancing the security sector, reforming the corrections system, promoting good governance, strengthening the independence of the judiciary, and promoting anti-corruption efforts, as well as restoring public services. It also serves as an important means of preparing the ground in support of the establishment of UNIOSIL.

B. Electoral reform

22. With the support of the Government of Sierra Leone and international partners, progress has been made in restructuring and capacity-building within the National Electoral Commission. This should enable it to organize and conduct credible presidential and parliamentary elections in 2007, which will be a critical landmark in the process of peace consolidation. The appointment of a chairperson for the Commission in May 2005 has boosted its capacity, including through the delimitation of constituencies well before the elections. That appointment and the continued recruitment of new staff should furthermore facilitate the restructuring of the Commission and increase its independence. The Government of Sierra Leone has committed $8 million to the Commission in support of this process. In addition, Sierra Leone's international partners have established a basket fund to mobilize the remaining $18.4 million required to complete the electoral tasks for the conduct of credible elections in 2007.

VII. Regional aspects

23. The Heads of State of the Mano River Union countries, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, met in Freetown on 28 July to consider a wide range of issues, including subregional peace initiatives, security and development, particularly the revitalization of the Mano River Union Secretariat and the settlement of the Yenga border dispute between Guinea and Sierra Leone. In a communiqué issued at the end of the meeting, the three leaders "reaffirmed their commitment to pursue a brotherly and peaceful solution" to the border issue, consistent with the statement issued at Conakry on 2 September 2004, which provides that "the village of Yenga belongs to the Republic of Sierra Leone". The three leaders further agreed that the border demarcation process would start on 20 August. The summit devoted considerable attention to the promotion of confidence-building measures in border areas, as well as the strengthening of security in the subregion.

VIII. Humanitarian situation

24. Since January 2005, some 5,600 Liberian refugees have been voluntarily repatriated. However, some 48,000 refugees remain in camps in Kenema and Bo. The operations of repatriation convoys have been hampered by bad road conditions, which have been further exacerbated by heavy rains. The World Food Programme is providing food to the refugees in all camps and in transit way stations during repatriation. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) intends to accelerate the voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees after

the October elections, once the rains have subsided. To this end, from May 2005, UNHCR has been undertaking a verification and return intentions survey of the camp population, the final phase of which commenced in mid-August.

IX. Economic recovery

25. The economic performance of Sierra Leone remained stable and GDP increased to 7.4 per cent in 2004. The sustained GDP growth is supported by the improvement in a number of economic sectors, including agriculture, mining, construction, manufacturing and services. Government finances also improved in 2004, but remained below projections in the first quarter of 2005. High international oil prices, delays in aid disbursements, and incomplete fiscal adjustment continued to affect inflation rates. Although inflation declined to 7.5 per cent at the beginning of the year, as opposed to 14.4 per cent at the end of 2004, it increased to 11.1 per cent at the end of the second quarter of 2005.

26. Despite continuing economic recovery, economic fundamentals remain, however, inadequate. Private sector growth is hampered by a fragile business environment characterized by poor physical and financial infrastructure, small-scale industries with a limited contribution to GDP, and a vast black market. Gross national savings are low, reflecting the depth of poverty in Sierra Leone and the overall weaknesses of financial institutions. This has resulted in limited financing for investments needed for private sector growth, especially small and medium-sized enterprises. The share of GDP devoted to investment was 19.6 per cent in 2004. However, most of the productive investments during the recovery period have been financed from foreign borrowing. It is expected that the Sierra Rutile Limited Company in Moyamba district will commence full operations at the end of 2005, which could boost foreign exchange earnings.

27. Since the postponement of the Consultative Group meeting for Sierra Leone, which was to have been held in June, preparations for the meeting later this year have been ongoing. These have focused on the timing, venue and agenda of the meeting, as well as the establishment of funding instruments such as multi-donor budget support, trust and basket funds, the results framework and the proposal to reform the development assistance partnership framework.

X. Human rights and the rule of law

28. Gains continue to be made with respect to the situation of human rights in the country. The decentralization of Government and the creation of new structures at the district level have enhanced participation in governance and the exercise of political rights at the local level. Political activities including debates among the candidates for the elections to be held in 2007 have remained peaceful so far. There were no reports of arbitrary killings, extrajudicial executions or a pervasive pattern of gross human rights violations except in the area of female genital mutilation, which is widespread in the country. Allegations of violations of other civil and political rights have been routinely investigated and prosecuted, although there were instances where the Government did not act in a timely and transparent manner to investigate them.

29. Nonetheless, as mentioned above, the main root causes of the conflict have not been fully addressed, and there still exist a number of internal human rights challenges which are both causes and effects of the civil conflict. This includes the weakness of the judicial sector, and slow progress in the area of economic, social and cultural rights, which is compounded by a disturbing level of youth unemployment and inadequate basic services.

30. Furthermore, a culture of respect for human rights and basic freedoms has yet to be fully established. Civil society remains weak and does not have the capacity to serve as a countervailing factor for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In this regard, the UNAMSIL programme of organizing local human rights groups into district-level human rights committees and providing them with training and capacity-building remains on course.

31. Following the visit to Sierra Leone from 13 to 16 July 2005 of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, the Government displayed a renewed interest in the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission. UNAMSIL, with the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, is currently working with the Attorney General and the Minister of Justice on the preparatory tasks required for the establishment of the Commission, including the development of a budget, the appointment of the commissioners, and the drafting of the rules of procedure. During her visit to Sierra Leone, the High Commissioner also offered to provide technical assistance for the establishment of the Commission.

32. The final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has now been published. On 8 August, UNAMSIL commenced the distribution of the report and sensitization on its findings and recommendations throughout the country. The Government has published a White Paper in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, which reflected most of its recommendations. However, the Government has yet to embark on concrete action towards implementing them.

33. The weak judicial sector remains of serious concern. A lack of judges, magistrates and prosecuting attorneys, as well as poor working conditions, result in backlogs, delays in trial and prolonged pre-trial detentions. Inadequate salaries of judiciary personnel, particularly judges, are also part of the problem. The justice system for minors requires particular attention, as minors continue to be detained together with adults in police cells and prisons.

34. Many corrections facilities have been renovated since the end of the conflict and are in compliance with minimum international standards. However, in some areas the corrections system continues to be confronted by many problems, relating to access to safe drinking water, adequate health-care facilities and medication, availability of rehabilitation programmes, overcrowding, and the high number of detainees without access to legal counsel.

XI. Gender issues

35. UNAMSIL, in conjunction with United Nations agencies and international and local non-governmental organizations, has conducted considerable work in promoting the rights of women and girls in Sierra Leone. An increasing number of

communities, especially at district centres, continue to be sensitized on the negative effects of gender-based violence through community meetings, workshops and radio programmes.

36. The UNAMSIL Gender Adviser has continued to train senior police officers on gender and women's rights issues. The Sierra Leone police Family Support Unit has been trained by UNAMSIL, the United Kingdom Department for International Development and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The Unit, together with the UNAMSIL child protection section, is increasingly playing a leading role in investigating cases of violence against women and children. It is also engaged in community education and sensitization through radio and television programmes.

37. The Law Reform Commission, which is tasked with the review of statutory and other laws with a view to reforming, developing, consolidating and codifying those laws, has started consultations to develop a law on domestic violence. The Commission has also produced draft bills on sexual offences, inheritance and succession, and the law on marriage, which have been submitted to the Government for consideration.

XII. HIV/AIDS issues

38. The HIV/AIDS Unit of UNAMSIL, in close collaboration with the force medical cell, has continued to conduct HIV/AIDS sensitization and awareness-training programmes. Troops from Pakistan, Ghana and the Russian Federation Aviation Unit have taken part in such programmes. UNAMSIL, together with the UNAIDS Country Coordinator and the United Nations country team, United Nations agencies and international and local non-governmental organizations, continued to be involved in activities on HIV/AIDS prevention among the various vulnerable groups in the communities, and the national uniformed services. UNAMSIL has also intensified cooperation and collaboration with the National AIDS Secretariat on HIV/AIDS.

XIII. Disciplinary issues

39. UNAMSIL continues to attach high priority to the training of its all civilian and military personnel on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, in line with the United Nations policy of zero tolerance. UNAMSIL started a series of training programmes for United Nations Volunteers and national and international personnel, in addition to regular briefings for new arrivals in the Mission area. The Mission also conducted training workshops for the sexual exploitation and abuse focal points established in United Nations agencies operating in the country.

XIV. Mission support issues

40. The administrative component of UNAMSIL continues to plan for the Mission's liquidation and support for UNIOSIL. The facilities that will be required by UNIOSIL are being prepared in close coordination with the United Nations country team. The administrative component is also conducting joint planning with UNMIL for security arrangements for the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

XV. Observations and recommendations

41. The prevailing stable environment in the country has made it possible to achieve further progress towards the consolidation of peace. The Government of Sierra Leone has made commendable efforts towards the consolidation of constitutional order and State authority throughout the country. The effective devolution of State functions through decentralization has ensured that an administrative machinery is now in place, contributing to overall political stability in the country.

42. However, many root causes of the conflict in Sierra Leone are yet to be addressed. The long-term sustainability of the gains achieved so far will require sustained international involvement and support, especially through joint efforts by the United Nations and the donor community. Such involvement will be particularly important for Government programmes aimed at addressing key socio-economic issues, such as poverty, youth unemployment, illiteracy and lack of basic infrastructure. The presence of UNIOSIL will assist the Government in overcoming these challenges.

43. Commendable progress has been made in the diamond-mining sector, particularly in the area of licensing and the substantial increase in the official exports of diamonds. The establishment of a national cadastral system has facilitated the settlement of disputes over mining rights and the boundaries of territorial administrative units, as well as mining sites. The Government should be encouraged to continue to build on initiatives aimed at generating additional revenue, including development projects for local communities, from the vital diamond-mining sector.

44. The summit of the Mano River Union Heads of State and Government held on 28 July in Freetown is a welcome development in the negotiations over the Yenga border dispute. While the leaders of Sierra Leone and Guinea should be commended for the steps they are taking in the search for peace in the subregion, the failure so far to initiate the effective border demarcation process between the two countries, as agreed during the summit, proves that further efforts, including by the international community, are required to help resolve a potential source of conflict. Following my previous report of 26 April, I have instructed my Special Representative to intensify his mediation efforts to assist both Governments in reaching a mutually acceptable solution before the closure of UNAMSIL, if possible.

45. In conclusion, I would like to express appreciation to the countries contributing troops and police to UNAMSIL, as well as to the Economic Community of West African States and donor countries for their unwavering support towards peace consolidation in Sierra Leone. I would like also to pay tribute to my Special Representative, Daudi Ngelautwa Mwakawago, and to all the staff of UNAMSIL and other United Nations programmes and agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations for their important contribution to the peace process in Sierra Leone.

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